

PETITION TO ESTABLISH
CHAMA BASIN WATERSHED PROTECTION AREA
ON THE
RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST

BACKGROUND:

The proposed Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area consists of 22,900 acres in the headwaters of the Chama River on the Rio Grande National Forest. Most of this area (21,600 acres) is already designated as an Upper Tier, Colorado Roadless Area, and is managed to maintain its natural and roadless characteristics.

This area is significant for protecting water in northern New Mexico. It is the drinking water source for the town of Chama. Also over 10 miles of streams within the Chama Basin have been determined eligible for inclusion with the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The area is a popular outdoor recreation area for locals and tourists. There are both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities including the East Fork and Rio Chama non-motorized trails and the Archuleta and West Fork motorized (ATV) trails. The area is also used for hunting and fishing, and horseback riding. A campground at the southern end of the area, is popular with all users, but especially equestrians. Cattle and sheep grazing occur in the area.

The area is rich in biological diversity. The basin's broad floodplain has large amounts of alluvium, abandoned river channels, and downed logs that create a very dynamic, active riparian system. The proposed area includes a 191-acre area identified by the Colorado Heritage Program as an area of "High Diversity Significance" montane riparian forest.

The area is used by lynx, a federally threatened species, and boreal owl and goshawk, two sensitive species. Bald eagles use the area in the summer.

Biodiversity elements of specific interest include mountain willow (*Salix monticola*)/mesic graminoid montane riparian willow carr, and a narrowleaf cottonwood/thinleaf alder (*Populus angustifolia*/*Alnus incana*) montane riparian forest. (CHNP Potential Conservation Area Report, 2015)

The Chama Basin was previously identified as an area with high potential for oil and gas development. The Forest Service acquired the mineral rights in 2011, consolidating surface and mineral rights. This allows the Forest Service the discretion to better manage the area for its watershed values.

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We the undersigned, request that the US Forest Service designate the Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area, as proposed by citizens and displayed on the attached map, to be included in the revision of the Rio Grande National Forest land management plan. We request that the US Forest Service manage the area in the following way:

- The Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area must be found unsuitable for oil and gas leasing and mineral material sales, and made “discretionary no lease” (DNL) for watershed protection purposes. The area also needs to be withdrawn from mineral entry.
- Manage the area for its watershed protection purposes while maintaining outstanding recreation opportunities, as these areas are important to the Village of Chama’s and Rio Arriba County’s tourism economy. Motorized and non-motorized trails in the area, and the campground, should be managed to minimize impacts to the riparian areas and the watershed.
- Manage the area for its watershed purposes by applying current Best Management Practices (BMP’s) for water, fire management, grazing, roads, recreation and other activities. There should be no net increase in the miles of permanent motorized access.
- Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers should be managed to preserve their eligibility for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

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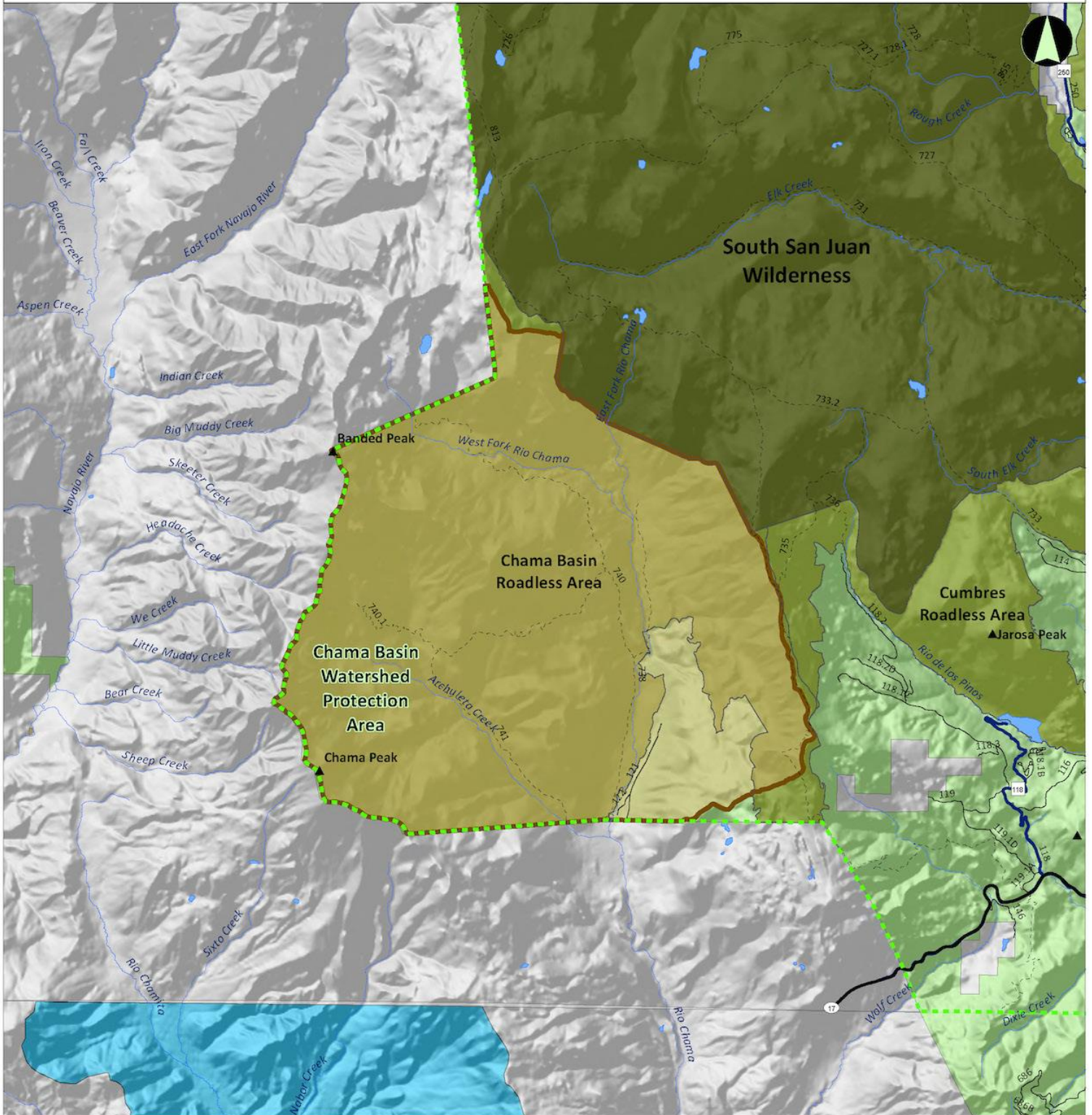
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Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area



Data Sources: BLM, CDOT, CPW, SRCA, USFS, USGS, wilderness.net
 Map Prepared By: Alison Gallensky
 Rocky Mountain Wild
 10/5/2016 16-122 v6

Legend

- ▲ Summit
- Existing Special Interest Area
- City
- Major Road
- USFS Road
- USFS Trail
- Lake/Pond
- Stream/River
- Recommended Designated Area
- Designated Wilderness
- Roadless Area

Land Ownership

- USFS
- BLM
- NPS
- State
- Other Public
- Private/Tribe

0 1 2 Miles

